A

CONSOLATORY LETTER,

FROM

Mr. THOMAS OLIVERS,

TO THE

Rev. THOMAS HANBY;

Occaſioned by the DEATH of his

WIFE, SON, and Diſtant RELATION.

"Inſatiate Archer! could not one ſuffice?
"Thy Shaft flew thrice, and thrice my Peace was ſlain."

YOUNG.

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A

CONSOLATORY LETTER, &c.

My very dear Brother,

A Few weeks ago, I was informed of the awful breach which Divine Providence lately made in your family: a breach which loudly demands the deepeſt pity, and ſofteſt ſympathy of every friend.—To loſe the wife of your youth,—or your firſt-born and only ſon,—or even a diſtant relation,—is, doubtleſs a *heavy* trial; but to have *all theſe* taken away, and that by a *ſingle* ſtroke, is a trial of the *firſt magnitude;* and every one in ſuch circumſtances *muſt* feel unleſs he be *paſt feeling*. I doubt not but *you* feel your ſhare. Your heart is young and unexperienced in ſuch ſcenes of woe, and therefore they fall on *you* with *double* weight. Oh! it is well you have omnipotence to ſupport you, or you would *ſink* beneath your loads, you would *fall* to riſe no *more*.

The cloud of this diſpenſation may, in all probability, be ſo *thick* at preſent, that you cannot ſee the hand which directed it; but it ſhall ſoon become tranſparent; and then you ſhall ſee the hand and heart of your beſt Father; and acknowledge it was unmixt goodneſs, which intended the ſtroke, and unerring wiſdom which directed it ſo near your heart. Till this appears, be *ſilent*; and when it does, *you ſhall* adore. You have often recommended to others, not to ſorrow as thoſe who have no hope. Let me recommend the ſame to you. Let thoſe tears which evidence your tender affection for your late friends, equally evidence your ſubmiſſion to your divine Father. You have heard of the patience of Job. With what deep reverence! with what unfeigned ſubjection! did he receive the repeated tidings of his complicated calamities. "The Lord gave", ſaid he,

"and the Lord hath taken away, and bleſſed be the name of "the Lord." And when he was ſtrongly ſolicited to murmer at the diſpenſation and blaſpheme it's Author, he rejected it with abhorrence: What! ſaid he, ſhall I receive good at the hand of God, and ſhall I not receive evil? It is then added, to his immortal honour, in all this Job ſinned not; may God ſay the ſame of you: "I took away a diſtant relation—and in this he ſinned not. I took away his ſon, his only ſon—and in this he ſinned not. I then tore from his bleeding heart, a tender wife, lately entwined about it—and in this he ſinned not. The firſt meſſenger of heavy tidings was ſcarce arrived, when lo: a ſecond followed; and ere he had delivered his more awful meſſage, behold: a third trod upon his heels—and in all this, he ſinned not." May you thus have a teſtimony that you pleaſe God; and it ſhall turn to your honour before aſſembled worlds.

If you have been a means of helping your friend to conquer the difficulties of life and death, ſhe is now bleſſing the day that ſhe became yours; I hope you were, and that ſhe and her new born ſon, are now two ſhining forms before the throne, rejoicing in the preſence of the Lamb. May you follow them to your Father's country. May you weather out every ſtorm, which ſhall riſe againſt you on the ocean of time,—and when the voyage of life is over, they ſhall meet and hail you on the celeſtial ſtrand, and bid you ten thouſand welcomes to their bleſſed abodes; and it may be when the all-bountiful Redeemer and all-righteous Judge ſhall aſſign you your reward, that they will be officious in arraying you in the garments of light; and in adorning your head with an immortal wreath; and in putting the emblem of victory and a golden harp into your hands. O that I was maſter of the language of immortality! O that I could ſpeak like the diſembodied! how loudly would I call on you; how powerfully would I perſuade you to glow, to burn, with ardent deſire, with holy affection, with flaming zeal, for that better world, for that better company, for that better enjoyment.

Imagine, for a moment, that your late friend is permitted to do this, and that you hear her addreſſing you in the following manner.

"O thou bleſſed among mortals, who waſt for a few ſhort liv'd moments my deareſt friend on earth;—thou findeſt by ſad,

but I by joyful experience, that the ſweeteſt earthly enjoyments is ſoon over. Thou ſeeſt as through a glaſs darkly, but I with the full blaze of eternal day, that all on earth, which mortals call good and great, is only emptineſs, vanity, and diſappointment. We, the inhabitants of unclouded day, look down from our exalted ſummits, and behold your world and all its glory, only as a ſpeck of darkneſs, encompaſſed by an infinite ocean of light. We ſee how cloſely eternity beſets you on every ſide, while you, like millions of intelligent atoms, crowd each other within your little ſphere, thouſands of which are daily hovering on the verge, while other thouſands are paſſing over:—We likewiſe ſee with eyes of pity, how eagerly you toil amidſt darkneſs, ſnares and deaths, and all for the trifles of a moment, while eternity, greedy eternity! not ſatisfied with the ſlaughter of ſix thouſand years, ſtill waits with its extended jaws to ſwallow up all ſucceeding generations. O how does all heaven pity your folly, in ſlighting the awful concerns of eternity; and in deſpiſing the infinite ſource of all bleſſedneſs, only for the bubbles and ſhadows of a diſordered world.

But, with ineffable pleaſure, we behold the happy few, who have declared war with the prince of darkneſs; who deſpiſe the empty enjoyments of a vain world; who riſe ſuperior to their own degeneracy, and ſeek their all in GOD.—Such are eſteemed by you, O ye blind mortals! as the filth and off-ſcouring of your world; but we, through all our different orders eſteem them as ſome of the brighteſt ornaments of ours. You long to drive them from earth; but we to receive them into heaven. And when he who bought them with his blood, ſhall ſign their happy diſmiſſion; a detachment of celeſtial meſſengers, a convoy of flaming guards, ſhall ſafely guide them through death, and ſwiftly conduct them home. Then, then ſhall the living doors ſpontaneouſly fly open to admit them—and all the tongues and eyes, and hearts of heaven, ſhall bid them a thouſand welcomes—while the mighty concave made vocal by the univerſal acclamations, reverberates the ſound. Till then, their lot is to ſuffer, to obey God, to reſiſt the devil, to renounce the world, to crucify themſelves. Oh! with what ſoft regard, tender pity, and deep compaſſion, do we behold their toil, their difficulties, their enemies, their dangers. Yea, how do we almoſt tremble to ſee their everlaſting fate ſo often weighed in a doubtful bal-

lance: but all the the mighty powers of heaven rejoice, and through all their countleſs myriads, bow in grateful homage, to that exalted name which preponderates the ſcale.

But, O thou! the late partner of my weal and woe, whoſe friendſhip followed me through life, through death, and ſtill follows me beyond the grave; what floods, what oceans of immortal pleaſure fills, o'erflows, and deluges my diſembodied capacity on thy account. O how I exult and triumph on ſeeing thy face towards Zion. With what inconceivable extacy do I behold thee labouring up the ſkies, and beckoning to thy followers, to follow after: joy—extacy—tranſport—glory—increaſe;—and wider, and ſtill wider expand my happy ſpirit, on every proſpect of thy arrival to this happy world. It exalts my moſt exalted joys;—it heightens my higheſt praiſe, to think that my deareſt earthly friend ſhall ſoon ſhine brighter than ten thouſand ſuns; and that ere long we ſhall ſit down together at Emanual's feet, to recount the dangers we have eſcaped on earth, and to repeat the ſtory of redeeming love.

Till then go on in the name of thy great maſter. Let nothing on earth obſtruct thy paſſage, or retard thy motion, towards a bliſsful immortality. Let thy eye be ever fixt on that ſacred ray which proceeds from the throne of God, and which, in great mercy, glimmers through the ſkies. Let it direct thy ſteps through all the darkneſs and dangers of time, and point out thy way to this world of glorious light; and when thou arriveſt, whole floods of endleſs day ſhall be poured on thy aſtoniſhed ſight. Let thy ears be always open to the ſacred calls of thy divine Maſter, and let them continually attend to the humble complaints of his afflicted ſervants; and in a ſhort time, thy enraptured ſoul ſhall be filled with the ſounds of theſe mighty, theſe thundering hallelujahs, which burſt for ever around the tremendous throne. Let thy tongue, now feeble and faultering, and which ſhall ſoon be ſilent in the grave, publiſh abroad through all the earth the love which aſtoniſhes all heaven. Publiſh, O publiſh its exalted height, its profound depth, its immeaſurable length and breadth. Tell the rebellious ſons of earth, of immenſity contracted to ſpan; tell them of infinity cruſhed beneath their load; tell them of immortality dying in their ſtead. Employ in this ſervice thy beſt ſtrains, and thy loudeſt accents; and in a ſhort time, thou ſhall haye a tongue of

celeſtial fire, and a voice which ſhall reach the moſt exalted of all our radient orbs. Let thy whole ſoul, thy whole ſtrength, thy whole time, be employed for him who lived, who bled, who died for thee. O be active as fire, be humble as the duſt, be ſerious as death, be ſolemn as the grave. Let thy faith be like Abraham's, thy meekneſs like Moſes's, thy patience like Job's, thy prayers like Elijah's, thy repentance like David's, thy zeal like St. Paul's, thy love like St. John's, thy praiſe like a Seraph's; and thy joy ſhall ſoon be like mine.—And O what riſing joy! —what ſwelling pleaſure—what ſtreaming, ſhining, flaming glory fills this place. How mighty, how huge is the reward of heaven. All is infinite—all eternal—and all is mine;—adieu." And now, as ſhe returns, imagine you hear the leſſening ſounds, "Hallelujah—hallelujah—hallelujah."

Thus ſhe being dead, yet ſpeaketh. May the important admonition have its due effect on your mind: may the ſound of it enter into your ſoul, and follow you wherever you go, ſo ſhall your abundant loſs become your more abundant gain.

The advantages intended you by this viſitation are, firſt, To convince you more deeply, of the mutability of all earthly comforts. Through the medium of this diſpenſation, you ſee more clearly how fluctuating theſe things are, and how little they are to be depended on. You ſee that riches, honours, friends, health and life, may be at our command in this hour; and in the next, make themſelves wings and fly away. With what clearneſs do you now behold that all fleſh is graſs, and that the glory of man as the flower of the graſs. With what advantage do you now read, that the faſhion of this world paſſeth away; paſſeth away even while we are beholding it, and that with ſuch ſpeed, that ere we have a full view, it is out of our ſight. Happy are they who have a divine confidence that an unchangable God is their father, and who have a lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and fadeth not away. May that confidence and hope increaſe in you daily, and be preſerved ſteadfaſt unto the end.

A ſecond advantage intended is, That you may ſit more looſe to the world and its enjoyments. Wretched as theſe enjoyments are, there is ſomething in them ſo peculiarly enſnaring, that it is almoſt impoſſible to poſſeſs them and not be deſtroyed; and it is much to be feared, that thouſands who have over-

come every other difficulty, will after all, be daſhed in pieces on this rock. But this is not for want of caution, the ſacred admonitions are ever ſounding in our ears; be not conformable to this world, ſet your affections on things above, and not on things on earth, love not the world, nor the things of the world; little children keep yourſelves from idols. Now, if after all theſe fatherly inſtructions, and kind commands, we ſtill incline to wander, the bleſſed God will hedge up our way with briers; if we break through theſe, he will in mercy, conceal ſome thorn under our favourite flower, or mix our ſweet delight with gall. If this proves ineffectual, and the little impertinencies of earth ſtill cleave to us, even like the fleſh to the bone, in this caſe, God is obliged to put us to more pain, and (in order to prevent our eternal ruin) to ſave us by ſuch means as are like tearing the fleſh from the bone. O what a priviledge is this! to have God ſtriving by every means, to ſave us from this preſent evil world; and this priviledge is yours at preſent. Your moſt gracious Father is now telling you, that you muſt be all his own; that he will have all your heart, that you may be fully bleſſed. And rather than the world or ſin or ſatan ſhould deſtroy or hurt, or even touch you to your diſadvantage; that he will interpoſe with all his wiſdom, and power, and mercy, and truth; and that nothing but the moſt wilful obſtinancy, ſhall be able to harm you. O what rich mercy and aſtoniſhing goodneſs is this! and how unutterably great is your priviledge. May it teach you to praiſe and adore its divine Author, with the moſt pure and warm affection. May it teach you to watch with the ſtricteſt jealouſy over your heart, and to keep at the utmoſt diſtance from the deſire of the fleſh, the deſire of the eye, and the pride of life. And may it teach you to look on yourſelf only as a ſtranger and ſojourner on earth; only as a poor pilgrim who is travelling through a vale of tears, in ſearch of a better country; who is urging his way to eternal life, through the valley of the ſhadow of death.

A third advantage intended is, To quicken you in your way; to cauſe you to mend your pace and double your diligence; we all have conſtant need of this. Our work is ſo important and our ſtrength ſo little, and our time ſo ſhort, that we ought to be broad awake, and all alive and on full ſtretch continually. But this is not pleaſing to fleſh and blood; not agreeable to our

wretched ſlothful hearts, theſe love to be at reſt and to be quiet, and ever incline us to fall aſleep. To prevent this, we have need of all the grace of God, and of the aſſiſtance of all his diſpenſations. Affliction (your preſent diſpenſation) is of ſingular uſe in this caſe; becauſe, thereby the ſoul is purged of that groſſneſs which occaſions its dulneſs and ſtupidity. Hence we often find, that perſons in affliction are zealous and active, who, at other times are cold and negligent. With what fervency do they then call upon God; with what ſteadineſs watch over their own hearts; with what impartiality examine themſelves; with what indignation vow againſt ſin; with what holy reſolution devote themſelves to God; and with what deep humility, ſerioufneſs and circumſpection walk before him.

How often have you deſired God to help you, thus to double your diligence? How often have you begged with ſtrong crying tears that he would do it by any means, ſo it might be done effectually?

And behold, he is now anſwering your prayer; he is granting the requeſt of your lips and the deſire of your heart. May the means by which his infinite and adorable wiſdom is promoting this deſirable end, promote it more abundantly day by day. May you continually increaſe in zeal for the glory of God, and in pity for a dying world. May you ſee in the cleareſt light, what numberleſs ſcenes of miſery; what univerſal ruin and deſtruction covers the whole earth. And may you ſee how the common enemy lieth in wait for unwary ſouls, how he firſt lays ſnares and baits for them, then captivates, then blind-folds them, then drags them in his curſed chain to eternal death, and then triumphs over his prey, and inſults the throne of God. May holy indignation againſt this enemy of God, this devourer of human kind, ſet you all on fire; and may the deepeſt compaſſion and the moſt generous concern for your fellow ſufferers, ſoften and melt, and enlarge your ſoul. And may this cauſe you to ſound the name of Jeſus, and publiſh his great ſalvation, with all your might. O may you fly with the ſacred tidings to the eaſt and to the weſt, to the north and to the ſouth. And may you eſteem it your higheſt honour and make it your chief concern, to be inſtrumental in plucking dying ſouls out of the jaws of deſtruction; to be inſtrumental in turning them from darkneſs to light, and from the power of ſatan to the living God, that they may receive the forgiveneſs of ſins, and an inheritance among them that are ſanctified by faith which is in Jeſus.

That you may thus act your part on earth, and then quit the ſtage of life with honour, and rejoice in the tremendous day of accounts, and be for ever with them whom your ſoul loveth: is the ſincere and fervent prayer of your ſympathizing

Friend and Brother,

T. OLIVERS.